

MEMORIAL

OF

THE MERCHANTS OF BATH,

STATE OF MAINE.

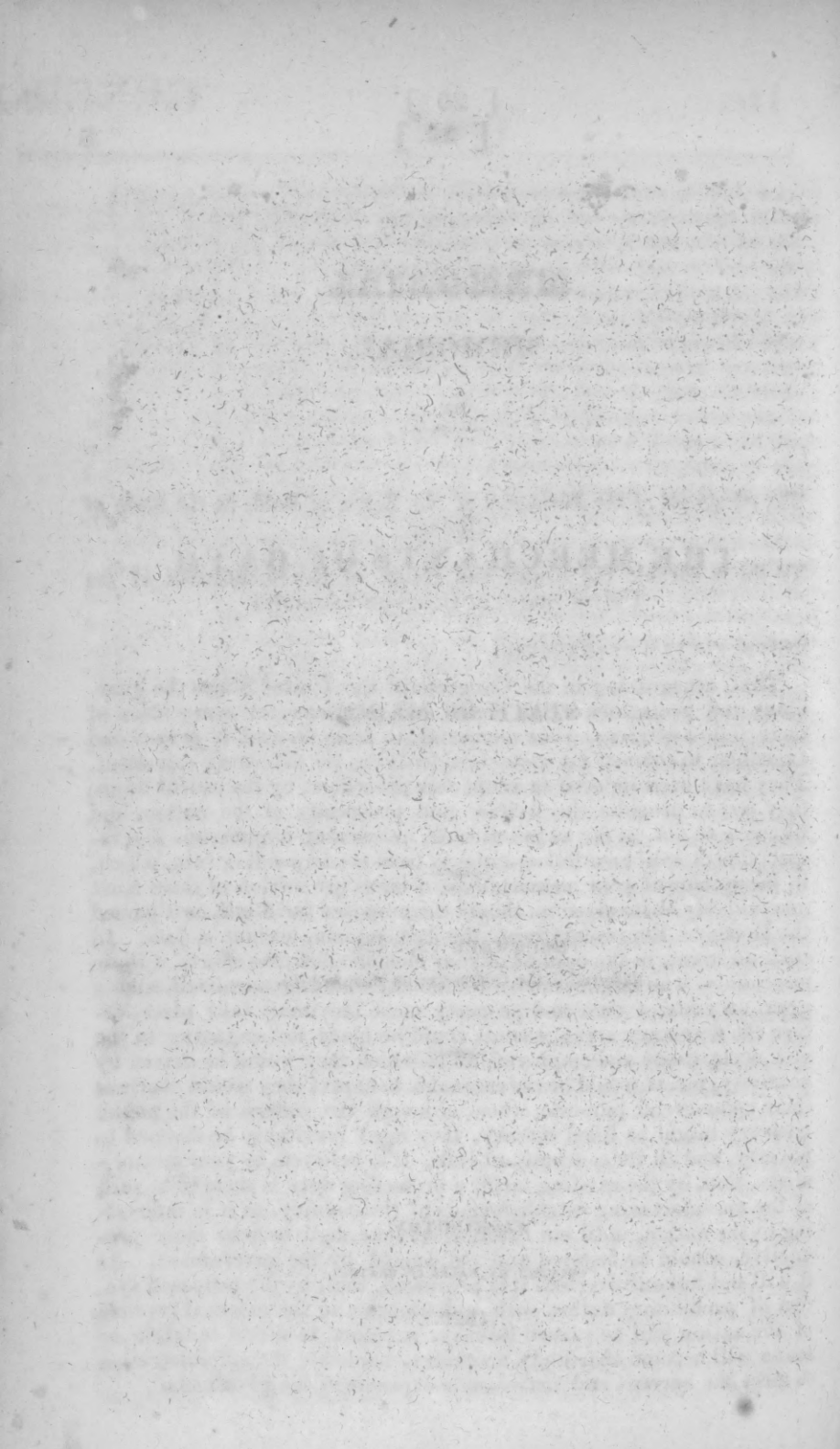
DECEMBER 12, 1820.

Referred to the Committee on Manufactures.

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1820.



MEMORIAL.

*The Memorial of the Merchants of the Town of Bath, in the State of
Maine,*

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the
United States in Congress assembled

RESPECTFULLY REPRESENTS:

That, recognizing in the Congress of the United States the guardians and protectors of the rights and privileges of every class of their fellow-citizens, your memorialists have deemed it proper and expedient to submit, for your consideration, the following statement. They have been induced to adopt this procedure, by the ardent desire they feel to promote the welfare and prosperity of the nation, and likewise to aid, as far as practicable, in rescuing a numerous and respectable class of their fellow-citizens from the impending ruin, which, in the opinion of your memorialists, a large proportion of them must unavoidably be involved in, should the proposed tariff bill, as it passed the House of Representatives, the last session, become a law. In such an event, in the opinion of your memorialists, the efforts of those merchants, who might survive the shock, would be paralyzed, and a great sacrifice of time and property must inevitably take place, before the necessary arrangements could be made for engaging in the new occupations and employments to which they would be driven by necessity; for, it would be unreasonable to expect they would continue their commercial pursuits, when, although the coffers of the public treasury might be filled thereby, they must inevitably be doomed to poverty, and all its concomitant evils. It is believed, by your memorialists, that, by the existing tariff, a protecting duty is secured to such of the manufacturing establishments of the country, as it is interesting to the nation, until our external revenue shall become more productive, should be fostered and patronized by the government. As it will not be controverted, it is presumed, that, by the proposed system of prohibitory duties, such a diminution in the external revenue of the nation will be caused thereby, a resort to direct taxation or loans will become absolutely necessary, to enable the administration to meet the current and unavoidable expenses of the government.

Although your memorialists are desirous every branch of American industry should be fostered and protected by the government, they are unable to discover either the policy or equity of prohibiting the ordinary and honorable pursuits of the mercantile class of our citizens, and heavily burthening the whole body of the agriculturists, and also a large majority of that portion of the community employed in the mechanical and other occupations, for the purpose of enriching a small class of citizens, whose claims upon the patronage of government, it is conceived, certainly, are not superior to those of their brethren, who will be excessively injured, if not ruined, by the enactment of the proposed tariff bill. It is just to infer, from what has heretofore been experienced, that the manufacturer will enhance the price of his commodities in proportion to the demand for them, and that all articles on which Congress may lay a prohibitory duty will advance in price at least from twenty to thirty per cent. which extra price is not only to be paid by the consumer, to enrich the manufacturer, but the consumer must be likewise, in all human probability, burthened with direct taxation to make up the deficiency in the external revenue, resulting from excessive and prohibitory duties. And this must be borne without any equivalent or remuneration being received, by the great body of the citizens, for the extra expenses with which they have been thus burthened. Should the proposed tariff be adopted, and the manufacturing interest increase to the enormous extent presented in the calculations of its advocates, that employment alone would require a large proportion of the natural increase of our population; consequently, the nation would find few, or no purchasers for their wild lands, and that source of revenue must become nearly extinct also. And hence it follows, should the nation unfortunately be engaged in war, instead of having reared a hardy patriotic band of agriculturists, who would, at all times, be ready and willing to defend their country, there will have been produced an enervated race of manufacturers, totally incapacitated to endure the fatigues and deprivations of the tented field.

Another inevitable consequence will result from the contemplated increase of duties. Our merchant vessels must remain unemployed to rot by the wharves, and consequently that important and valuable nursery of American seamen will cease to exist, and the nation be deprived of the only resource for manning their armed vessels, that can be safely relied on in the event of a war, or in cases of great emergency. The habits and pursuits of men, experience teaches us, cannot be immediately changed; it is, therefore, considered problematical whether even the magical wand of government possesses sufficient virtue to convert, by its touch, merchants, agriculturists, or seamen, into manufacturers, or to break down their manly independent spirits, and render them the passive menials of taskmasters,—consequently, the rising generation must be destined to fill the workshops of the manufacturers, a large proportion of whom, like those thus employed in Europe, will be doomed to end their miserable existence in the asylums of pauperism. Your memorialists confess they are alarmed at this hor-

rid picture of prospective misery. To secure the permanent interest of any undertaking of magnitude, experience has proved, it should be permitted to progress regularly; that the sudden transfer of large capitals from one kind of business to another, is always made at great hazard: the capitalists, aware of that, will hesitate long before they invest their property in new, and, to them, untried experiments. Commerce will be cut up; a stagnation of business will ensue; and a general deterioration in the wealth of the nation will be the result.

It will be found, it is confidently believed, few, if any, complaints are heard from the proprietors of manufactories economically and skilfully managed, and wherefore should the government be called upon to protect the others against the casualties incident to the business, or the mismanagement of their agents? It is known to be the opinion of many well informed persons concerned in manufacturing establishments, that the proposed measure is a hazardous experiment; for, should even that portion of the capital now employed in commerce, which may be saved from the destruction that awaits it, be invested, in consequence of the proposed governmental bonus, in manufactories, a reduction of the external revenue would follow; direct taxes must be laid, which would unquestionably result in producing a repeal of the additional duties, and thereby involve the manufacturers in total ruin. It is an acknowledged fact, that the capital employed in commerce greatly exceeds that employed in manufactories, that the former yields a large revenue to the government, and the latter nothing. But, should the interest and claims of the class of citizens now soliciting your patronage be, in the opinion of Congress, overbalanced by those of the manufacturers, it is presumed, the interest of that highly deserving and respectable class of our fellow-citizens, the agriculturists, will not be overlooked, and that it will not be deemed advisable or expedient to tax the many for the benefit of the few. And here your memorialists would, with due deference, inquire why, notwithstanding the zeal which has been manifested to promote the interests of the whole family of American artisans, one of the most important branches of the mechanical art should have been altogether overlooked: we allude to that useful and highly important employment of ship-building, a branch of mechanical industry that requires, it is believed, the aid and assistance of a greater number of the different kinds of mechanics, and other laborers, than, probably, any other business. Yet, it is a lamentable fact, that some of the articles, which constitute a large item in the cost of a ship, and which, for a long series of years, it will not be practicable to obtain from the manufactories of our own country, are subject, even by the existing tariff, to the highest rate of duties. Much has heretofore been said and written in support of the importance of the carrying trade of the United States, and it is now conceded, that, during the period in which all the European nations were engaged in war, and while the United States remained almost the only neutral power in the civilized world, commercial pursuits yielded, in proportion to the capital employed, a greater profit than could have been

realized in any other business. But those times have passed away; and it is now understood, that propositions have been made by our government, to foreign nations, for placing the commerce between the United States and those nations on equal and reciprocal grounds, which propositions, it is also understood, have already been accepted by some of the foreign powers, and probably will, ultimately, be acceded to by most of them; it therefore cannot be expected, under these circumstances, the American merchants can be the successful rivals of the foreign ship owners, unless our citizens are enabled to build their ships as cheap as their foreign competitors. Still, we regret to state, we have seen no attempt to foster and protect those industrious and meritorious classes of our citizens engaged in ship building. They have not only been left to struggle against the embarrassments and impediments produced by the high duties before stated, but are now fearfully apprehensive a fatal measure is about to be adopted, which will plunge them into a deplorable state of poverty and wretchedness. Many other facts and arguments might, in the opinion of your memorialists, be adduced to prove that the proposed tariff, if adopted, would produce the effect and operation herein alleged; but, as our object is to present a general view of the subject only, and not a detailed examination of the operation that the proposed prohibitory duties would have, as well on the revenue of the nation, as upon the prosperity and happiness of the commercial and agricultural classes of the community, and believing the sound and unanswerable reasons, which must present themselves against the adoption of the measure in question, are too numerous, not to be readily perceived, and duly estimated, by the honorable members of the Senate and House of Representatives, it has been deemed altogether unnecessary to go further into detail on the subject, in this memorial.

Your memorialists ask for the adoption of such measures only, as are founded on the immutable principles of justice; they claim no exclusive privileges; but, only to be placed on an equal footing with their fellow-citizens generally. Relying on the wisdom and justice of Congress, your memorialists have considered it their duty to present the foregoing statement, believing that, on a subject of such deep concern and importance, those measures will be adopted that are calculated to promote the happiness and best interest of the nation.

Bath, November 2d, 1820.

